



4310-05-P

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement

Notice of Availability of the Western Energy Company's Rosebud Mine Area F Draft Environmental Impact Statement

[S1D1S SS08011000 SX064A000 189S180110; S2D2S SS08011000 SX064A000 18XS501520]

AGENCY: Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, U.S. Department of the Interior.

ACTION: Notice of Availability.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) has prepared a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Western Energy Company's Rosebud Mine Area F (Project) in southeastern Montana and by this notice is announcing the opening of the comment period. The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is a co-lead on this EIS process.

DATES: To ensure comments will be considered, OSMRE will accept electronic or written comments on or before 45 days from the date that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency publishes the Notice of Availability for the Draft EIS in the Federal Register. OSMRE will publish in the Federal Register and/or local newspapers the date, time, and location of the public meeting on the Draft EIS. If you are a disabled individual who needs reasonable accommodation to attend the public meeting, please contact the

person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT** after we publish the notice of the specific meeting location and date.

ADDRESSES: The Draft EIS is available for review at:

<https://www.wrcc.osmre.gov/initiatives/westernEnergy/documentLibrary.shtm>. Paper and computer compact disk (CD) copies of the Draft EIS are available for review at the OSMRE Western Region Office, 1999 Broadway Street, Suite 3320, Denver, Colorado, 80202. In addition, a paper and CD copy of the Draft EIS is available for review at each of the following locations:

Rosebud County Library
201 North 9th Avenue
Forsyth, MT 59327

Between the hours of 11:00 AM and 7:00 PM Monday through Thursday; 11:00 AM to 5:00 PM Friday; 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM Saturday (Closed Sunday)

Montana DEQ Headquarters (Lee Metcalf Building)
1520 East 6th Avenue
Helena, MT 59620

Between the hours of 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM Monday through Friday (Closed Saturday and Sunday)

BLM Miles City Field Office
111 Garryowen Road
Miles City, MT 59301

Between the hours of 7:45 AM and 4:30 PM Monday through Friday (Closed Saturday and Sunday)

BLM State Office, Billings, MT
5001 Southgate Drive
Billings, MT 59101

Between the hours of 8:00 AM and 4:00 PM Monday through Friday (Closed Saturday and Sunday)

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Logan Sholar, OSMRE Project

Coordinator; Telephone: 303-293-5036; Address: 1999 Broadway Street, Suite 3320,

Denver, Colorado 80202-3050; email: lsolar@osmre.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

- I. Project Purpose**
- II. Background on the Rosebud Mine**
- III. Background on the Project**
- IV. Alternative**

I. Project Purpose

The purpose of the Project is to consider continued operations at the Rosebud Mine by permitting and developing a new surface mine permit area, known as permit Area F. Western Energy submitted a permit application to DEQ for the proposed 6,746-acre permit Area F (also referred to as the project area) at the Rosebud Mine, which is an existing 25,455-acre surface coal mine annually producing 8.0 to 10.25 million tons of low-sulfur subbituminous coal. If DEQ approves the permit and a Federal mining plan for the Project is approved as proposed, at the current rate of production, the operational life of the Rosebud Mine would be extended by 8 years. Mining operations in the project area, which would commence after all permits and approvals have been secured and a reclamation and performance bond has been posted, would last 19 years. Western Energy estimates that 70.8 million tons of recoverable coal reserves exist in the project area and would be removed during the 19-year operations period. As with other permit areas of the Rosebud Mine, all coal would be combusted locally at the Colstrip and Rosebud Power Plants.

Western Energy is required to obtain a surface coal mine operating permit (pursuant to the Montana Strip and Underground Mine Reclamation Act (MSUMRA), Section 82-4-221 et seq., Montana Code Annotated) and approval of a Federal surface

mining plan (30 CFR 746) for proposed permit Area F. OSMRE's purpose for the Project is to review and make a recommendation to the Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management (ASLM) in the form of a Mining Plan Decision Document to approve, disapprove, or approve with conditions, the proposed Federal surface mining plan for the Project. The ASLM will decide whether the mining plan is approved, disapproved, or approved with conditions.

DEQ's purpose for the Project is to review and make a decision on Western Energy's surface mine operating permit application under MSUMRA and to review and make decisions on the following related permits: 1) an application for a new Montana Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (MPDES) permit, and 2) an application to modify Montana Air Quality Permit #1570*07 to include the project area. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is a cooperating agency on the Draft EIS.

The Draft EIS evaluates the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the Proposed Action and alternatives on the environment.

OSMRE is complying with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA Section 106)(16 U.S.C. §470f), as provided in 36 CFR 800.2(d)(3), concurrently with the NEPA process, including public involvement requirements and consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer and Historic Preservation Officers with Tribal nations. Native American Tribal consultations are ongoing and have been conducted in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, and U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) policy. Federal, Tribal, State, and local agencies, along with other stakeholders that may be interested in or affected by the Federal agencies' decisions on the Project, are invited to submit comments on the Draft EIS.

As part of its consideration of the proposed Project's impacts on threatened and endangered species, OSMRE conducted informal consultation as well as streamlined consultation per the final 4(d) rule for the northern long-eared bat with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA)(16 U.S.C. §1536), and its implementing regulations, as provided in 50 CFR 400. The Section 7 consultation considered direct and indirect impacts from the proposed Project, including mining and related operations in the project area and continued operation of the Colstrip and Rosebud Power Plants.

In addition to compliance with NEPA, NHSA Section 106, and ESA Section 7, all Federal actions will be in compliance with applicable requirements of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 (30 U.S.C. 1021-1328), the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. 1251-1387), the Clean Air Act (42 U.S.C. 7401-7671q), and Executive Orders relating to environmental justice, Tribal consultation, and other applicable laws and regulations.

II. Background on the Rosebud Mine

Coal has been mined at Colstrip, MT for more than 90 years. The Northern Pacific Railway established the city of Colstrip and its associated mine in the 1920s to access coal from the Fort Union Formation. Coal mining began in 1924, providing fuel for the railway's steam locomotive trains. During the initial 34 years of mining, 44 million tons of coal were mined. By 1958, diesel-powered locomotives replaced steam engines and mining ceased in the Colstrip area.

In 1959, the Montana Power Company purchased rights to the Rosebud Mine in the city of Colstrip with plans to build power generation facilities. The Rosebud Mine

operation began production in 1968. In 2001, Westmoreland purchased the Rosebud Mine; its subsidiary, Western Energy, continues to operate the mine today. Although the Rosebud Mine has shipped coal by rail as recently as 2010, all coal currently produced by the mine is consumed locally at the Colstrip and Rosebud Power Plants.

III. Background on the Western Energy Proposed Permit Area F

Western Energy proposes to conduct surface coal mining and reclamation operations within the 6,746-acre proposed permit Area F of the Rosebud Mine. The project area would be adjacent to the western boundary of Area C, 12 miles west of Colstrip. Western Energy proposes to conduct surface coal mining operations on an approximately 2,159-acre portion of the project area, with a total disturbance footprint, including soil storage, scoria pits, and haul roads, of approximately 4,260 acres. The project area would, in conjunction with the mining of any reserves remaining with existing permit areas of the Rosebud Mine, supply low-sulfur coal to the Colstrip Power Plant (Unites 3 and 4) at a rate of between 7.7 and 9.95 million tons annually. In addition, coal from the Rosebud Mine with higher sulfur content would be supplied to the Rosebud Power Plant at a rate of approximately 300,000 tons annually.

Approval of the proposed permit Area F is expected to require several other agency actions, including:

- Finding and recommendation by BLM and OSMRE with respect to Western Energy's Resource Recovery and Protection Plan and other requirements of Western Energy's lease. BLM will also submit a recommendation regarding the Federal mining plan;

- Approval by DEQ of Western Energy's Montana Air Quality Permit #1570-07 to allow expansion of the geographic extent of the mine to include the proposed permit Area F; and
- Approval by DEQ of a new MPDES permit.

IV. Alternatives

Alternatives carried forward in the Draft EIS include No Action (Alternative 1), the Proposed Action (Alternative 2), and the Proposed Action Plus Environmental Protection Measures (Alternative 3). Several alternatives were considered but dismissed from further consideration.

PUBLIC COMMENT PROCEDURES: In accordance with the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations for implementing NEPA and DOI's NEPA regulations, OSMRE solicits public comments on the Draft EIS. Comments on the Draft EIS may be submitted in writing or by email. At the top of your letter or in the subject line of your message indicate that the comments are "Western Energy Area F Draft EIS Comments."

You are invited to mail your comments on the Draft EIS to: ATTN: Western Energy Area F EIS C/O: Nicole Bauman, ERO Resources Corporation, 1842 Clarkson Street, Denver, CO 80218. You may also submit your comments electronically to <http://svc.mt.gov/deq/publiccomment> or by email to the following email address: western-energy-area-f-eis@eroresources.com. Comments can also be made either in writing or verbally at a public meeting that will be announced at a later date. Be specific in your comments and indicate the chapter, page, paragraph, and sentence that your comment applies to.

All submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be available for public review to the extent consistent with applicable law.

Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments may not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision.

If you would like to be placed on the mailing list to receive future information, please contact the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**.

Dated: August 17, 2017.

David Berry,
Regional Director, Western Region.

Authority: 40 CFR 1506.6, 40 CFR 1506.1

[FR Doc. 2017-28407 Filed: 1/2/2018 8:45 am; Publication Date: 1/3/2018]